

PROJECT NAME REDACTED

Sample scene 1 - Samuel introduction scene

Marianne Cassidy

Approx. 2,000 words

Background: Hana's Bookshop

JASMINE (NARRATION)

It's barely been five minutes since Hana left, and I'm already bored out of my mind.

Having her to chat to made the store feel less empty, but now that I actually think about it...

...we've had absolutely no customers today. Is that normal? Maybe it's expected for a niche place like this.

Noir is sprawled across a pile of books and old papers, his tail dangling and flicking about lazily.

JASMINE (SPEECH)

It's just you and me, huh, Noir?

JASMINE (NARRATION)

I tentatively put my hand out to him, but his ears flatten against his head and he hisses at me as usual.

I swear cats don't usually hate me this much.

JASMINE (SPEECH)

What did I ever do to you?

JASMINE (NARRATION)

He rolls to face away from me, as if to say my very existence is my crime.

(MORE)

JASMINE (NARRATION) (cont'd)

His tail twitches with increased vigor.

??? (SAMUEL)

Mind your fingers. He isn't very fond of strangers.

JASMINE (NARRATION)

A deep voice grabs my attention away from Noir and toward the door. There's a man leaning against the frame, watching me coolly.

A customer! Finally!

And an otherworldly beautiful one, at that.

I gawk at his lavender hair and eyes for a few awkward seconds before I realise I should probably do my job.

JASMINE (SPEECH)

Um, hi! Hello! Welcome-

JASMINE (NARRATION)

Before I can finish my sentence, the customer enters and starts to browse one of the shelves.

JASMINE (SPEECH)

...

Are you looking for anything in particular?

JASMINE (NARRATION)

If he heard me, he makes no indication of it.

I cough quietly.

He slides a book off the shelf and glances my way.

??? (SAMUEL)

No help required. Excuse me.

JASMINE (NARRATION)

The customer takes his book to a cushioned chair in the corner, not even meeting my eyes as he sits and begins to read.

Alrightie then.

Is that allowed? Shouldn't he buy it first? This is a bookshop, not a library, right?

To add to my surprise, Noir makes a chirping noise as he hops off his stack of books and trots over to the man, eagerly jumping onto his lap.

He begins to purr as he receives a good scratch behind the ear.

Noir, you traitor...!

I lean against the counter, sizing the guy up.

Should I tell him he needs to pay for the book before he reads it? Hana didn't really brief me on this particular situation.

Regardless, I don't want to just leave him to act as if he owns the place.

JASMINE (SPEECH)

Do you come here a lot? Noir seems to be a fan of yours.

??? (SAMUEL)

Not exactly.

JASMINE (SPEECH)

Are you local? I don't think I've seen you in Starvale before. Granted, I've only just moved back.

JASMINE (NARRATION)

Silence.

JASMINE (SPEECH)

...I'm Jasmine, what's your name?

JASMINE (NARRATION)

He hesitates as if debating whether or not to blank me again.

SAMUEL

Samuel.

JASMINE (SPEECH)

That's a pretty cool name.

JASMINE (NARRATION)

He ignores me.

What an ice king.

I'm not sure I've ever felt this amount of complete and total disdain from a stranger before.

Still, I'm nothing if not determined.

JASMINE (SPEECH)

How did you manage to get so close with Noir? He really hates my guts.

SAMUEL

Maybe he's a good judge of character.

JASMINE (NARRATION)

Huh? What? Did he just try to insult me?

JASMINE (SPEECH)

Uh. I'm sorry?

JASMINE (NARRATION)

Samuel closes his eyes and pinches the bridge of his nose in annoyance.

SAMUEL

Look, I realise this is your job, but can't you see I'm trying to read? Please leave me alone.

JASMINE (NARRATION)

I gape at him. Why did my first customer have to be this guy?

JASMINE (SPEECH)

Right. Um. Okay. I'll leave you be.

JASMINE (NARRATION)

Without so much as a thank you,
Samuel goes back to his book.

Message received: Samuel is an
asshole.

I start trying to busy myself
around the store, making sure the
shelves are neat and brushing the
loose fur from Noir's freshly
vacated nap spot.

Samuel continues to read in
silence. I try to avoid looking in
his direction, but it's hard when
he's the only other person in the
room.

If only I could escape into the
office, but Hana expressly forbade
it.

I play with the corners of a
notebook on the counter and
mentally beg Hana to come back
soon.

15 minutes later.

JASMINE (NARRATION)

It's not just a matter of her
saving me from Samuel and Noir
anymore; if Hana doesn't bring me
some food soon, my stomach is going
to eat itself.

The corners of the notebook are
beginning to crinkle by the time
Hana finally gets back to the
store, a paper bag hanging off one
wrist and a coffee cup in each
hand.

She barely seems to notice Samuel
as she approaches the counter,
dunking her spoils in front of me.

HANA

Sorry about the wait, seems like everyone in town wanted a sandwich today.

JASMINE (NARRATION)

She hands me my lunch: a seedy brown bun filled with leafy greens, the bread still warm from the oven.

HANA

Drinks were half-off with food, so I nabbed us some lattes, too.

JASMINE (NARRATION)

Hana glances around the store.

HANA

Clearly we're going to need the extra energy to handle this stifflingly busy day.

JASMINE (NARRATION)

She hasn't mentioned Samuel, which only makes me even more curious.

JASMINE (SPEECH)

Thanks, this is great--by the way, there's, uh, kind of a weirdo sitting over there?

JASMINE (NARRATION)

Hana cranes her neck to glance at Samuel. A small smile plays at her lips.

JASMINE (SPEECH)

He hasn't bought anything, and Noir actually seems to like him. It's really strange. Plus, he's being an ass.

JASMINE (NARRATION)

Hana's smile only broadens.

HANA

Yes, Samuel *can* be a bit of a weirdo. His bark is worse than his bite, though. Promise.

He's technically a regular, though I'm not sure someone counts as a regular if they've never bought anything.

JASMINE (SPEECH)

And you're...fine with that?

JASMINE (NARRATION)

She shrugs.

HANA

It's not like he's getting in anyone's way. Also--as you can see--Noir loves him.

JASMINE (NARRATION)

I take a peek at Samuel. I'd been trying to keep my voice down, but he seems to be all too aware that we're talking about him.

There's a knot between his eyebrows, and he's ceased petting Noir.

I gulp nervously.

JASMINE (SPEECH)

You're sure he's harmless?

JASMINE (NARRATION)

Hana opens her mouth to answer, but Samuel cuts her off.

SAMUEL

Don't stop gossiping on my account. It's not like I can hear you or anything.

JASMINE (NARRATION)

He gently prompts Noir to hop off his lap, which the cat does with not insignificant distaste.

SAMUEL

Now that you're here, Hana, maybe you could tell your employee to stop badgering me so I can finish my book?

JASMINE (NARRATION)

Badgering? I've barely spoken to him!

SAMUEL

I don't know why she's so chatty. Bookshops should be quiet.

HANA

That's libraries. There's no actual rule that bookshops have to be quiet, you know. Just your personal grievances.

And maybe Jasmine is only pestering you because she's interested in you? You're not exactly inconspicuous.

JASMINE (NARRATION)
He scoffs, folding his arms across his chest.

SAMUEL
I'd prefer it if she weren't.

JASMINE (NARRATION)
I'm sick of this tension. If he's not going to be nice to me, then I should just...

Choice A - "Tease Samuel with Hana"

JASMINE (SPEECH)
But I **am** interested in you. Who wouldn't be?

JASMINE (NARRATION)
I lean my elbow on the counter and rest my chin in my hand, looking into his crystal-coloured eyes. He blinks at me.

JASMINE (SPEECH)
It's not every day you see gorgeous strangers wandering around Starvale. Of course I'd want to get to know you.

JASMINE (NARRATION)
His face morphs into a confused mix of surprise and fluster.

SAMUEL
I, uh...

JASMINE (NARRATION)
I didn't think it would feel so good to leave him speechless! Who knew he'd be so easily embarrassed.

Vengeance is sweet.

Samuel rubs the back of his neck with his hand, not meeting my eyes anymore. I must have really got to him.

JASMINE (NARRATION)

Hana seems to be choking back a smirk.

HANA

If she's bothering you so much, why don't you buy one of our books for once so you can go read on a nice park bench somewhere?

JASMINE (NARRATION)

His embarrassment is quickly and visibly replaced with frustration again, though it seems slightly more sheepish now.

SAMUEL

I'll just pretend she isn't there. That shouldn't be particularly difficult.

JASMINE (NARRATION)

Sounds like he's sulking.

He goes back to his corner by the bookshelves where Noir has commandeered the chair he was sitting on before.

Being as enamoured with Samuel as he is, Noir hops off the chair and then back onto his lap as soon as Samuel moves to reclaim the turf.

He opens his book, then steals a furtive glance back at me, his face etched with...something. He quickly darts his gaze back to the page when his eyes meet mine.

Hana is still smiling as she sits down with her lunch.

Choice B - "Apologise to him"

JASMINE (SPEECH)

Ok, I can see some damage control is required.

I'm sorry Samuel--it wasn't right of me to judge you for reading for free when Isolde is fine with it.

I both retract calling you a weirdo and also swear not to bother you anymore.

JASMINE (NARRATION)

I place my hand over my heart for emphasis.

Both Hana and Samuel stare at me in surprise for a moment.

SAMUEL

Oh, well, uh...

JASMINE (NARRATION)

He looks away from me awkwardly, perhaps even with a little bit of guilt.

SAMUEL

I'm sorry, too. I shouldn't have been so rude to you when you were just trying to be...hospitable.

I'm glad we have an understanding.

JASMINE (NARRATION)

Samuel lingers for a second too long before turning on his heel and returning to his corner.

He glances back at me--again for a second too long--before whipping his head around and rubbing the back of his neck self-consciously.

Hana gives me an "I'm impressed" nod and a wry smile before sitting down to eat her lunch.

Choice C - "Tell him off"

JASMINE (SPEECH)

Look, you're being unreasonable, not to mention rude as hell.

JASMINE (NARRATION)

His eyes widen at me.

JASMINE (SPEECH)

Usually people aren't offended by the very idea of conversation. And you really shouldn't use a bookshop like it's a library. Hana has to make a living, you know.

JASMINE (NARRATION)

Samuel stares at me, then at Hana, as if expecting her to come to his rescue.

Accountability sure sucks, huh?

HANA

Jasmine isn't wrong. Generally, you're not supposed to read books without buying them.

It's too much work to enforce that kind of thing, though, so I never bother.

JASMINE (NARRATION)

Samuel gives her an indredulous look.

SAMUEL

You could have just told me.

HANA

Yes, well, now Jasmine is telling you, isn't she? So no harm done.

JASMINE (NARRATION)

I do my best not to appear too vindicated, but boy is it ever a rush to stand up for myself.

Meanwhile, Samuel looks all too much like a puppy whose owner has told him not to play in the mud.

HANA

I propose a truce: Jasmine, you won't speak to Samuel while he's reading, and Samuel, you won't complain about Jasmine doing her job. Does that sound too hard?

JASMINE (SPEECH)

That sounds perfect.

JASMINE (NARRATION)

Samuel half pouts, half scowls.

HANA

Samuel?

SAMUEL

Alright. Fine.

JASMINE (NARRATION)

With that, he slinks back to his corner, to his book and Noir, who has been sitting patiently on his chair.

I take a sip of the latte Hana brought me and hide my victory smile behind my cup.